DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 228 025 RC 013 992

AUTHOR Massey, Sara; Crosby, Jeanie
TITLE Preparing Teachers for Rural Schools.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Canada, April 11-15, 1983).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Characteristics; *Community Involvement; *Education Courses; Higher Education; *Multigraded Classes; Noninstructional Responsibility; *Rural Schools; Rural Urban Differences; Student Experience; *Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Generalists

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the differences which characterize rural schools and suggests ways in which teacher preparation programs might train beginning teachers specifically for rural schools. Section 1 describes ways in which teacher preparation programs can help prospective teachers prepare for the breadth of responsibilities expected in rural schools, i.e., increase the number of content areas in which students are prepared to work, and develop students' skills in integrating the curriculum. Section 2 and 3 provide discussions and suggestions relevant to the student teacher being prepared to deal with the rural community. The sections suggest: students' understanding of the roles of the community in American schooling should be expanded, students' experience with close relationships between a community and its schools be increased, students' skills in accessing information and other resources be developed, and students' self-sufficiency be developed. (AH)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED228025

# PREPARING TEACHERS FOR RURAL SCHOOLS

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jeanie West Crosby

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Sara Massey
Incarnate Word College
San Antonio, Texas

Jeanie Crosby
University of Maine
Machias, Maine

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Canada, April 11-15, 1983).

RC013992

MAY 1983
RECEIVED
ERIC/CRESS

PREPARING TEACHERS FOR RURAL SCHOOLS

Objectives:

To determine special preparation needs of teachers in rural schools
To develop recommendations regarding these needs for teacher preparation programs.

Perspective:

Although the basics of effective instruction are similar in urban, suburban, and rural schools, there are important demands of the instructional settings which are quite different. This study focuses on these differences of the rural school setting.

Methods and data sources:

The primary method is a review of the literature on rural and small schools. The data sources include materials from ERIC, books, articles, conference proceedings, curricula, and unpublished papers available to the researchers. Problems related to the preparation, recruitment, and retention of teachers for rural schools have been identified in the literature. Promising practices of teacher preparation programs related to resolving these problems have also been identified.

Conclusions:

These problems and promising practices have been synthesized into a set of recommendations for teacher preparation programs working with students expecting to teach in rural schools. These recommendations include: 1) increase the number of content areas in which participants are prepared to work, 2) increase the age ranges with which participants are prepared to work, 3) develop participants' skills of integration, 4) increase participants' understanding of the roles of the community in American schooling, 5) increase participants' experience with close relationships between a community and its schools, 6) increase participants' experience in rural communities, 8) develop participants' skills in accessing information and other resources, and 9) develop participants' self-sufficiency.

Educational significance:

The level of significance of the differentiated preparation needed by teachers in rural schools is a continuing issue in many states and universities. This research project was begun at the request of the President of one of the University of Maine's seven campuses as he was making decisions about a "rural" laboratory school and of the Dean of the University College of Education. The preliminary conclusions are being used as the basis of discussions between the University of Maine, the State Department of Educational and Cultural Services, and the State Board of Education as they explore differentiated preparation and local certification issues.

# PREPARING TEACHERS FOR RURAL SCHOOLS

Sara Massey and Jeanie Crosby

## Introduction

Emily Green graduated from college and received her teaching certificate in June. She enthusiastically applied for teaching jobs only to find very few positions available for beginning teachers. Seeing an ad for teachers needed in High River, she got out her state map to find exactly where it was. She located High River in the northern part of the state, miles from nowhere, with a population of 985. Knowing that she had to have a job, she applied... and was hired.

Being a new teacher is difficult, but Emily's first year was a killer, full of unexpected complications. She was to teach two grades because the school was so small. Granted, she had few students, ten in the third grade and eight in the fourth, but she was expected to teach all subjects for both grades. There were no special teachers for art, music, or physical education. It was expected that she could and would do it all. As she began informal reading inventories in preparation for reading groups, she faced another problem. Some students seemed to be several years behind, perhaps indicating learning disabilities. In talking to the principal, she learned the school had an arrangement with another district in which they shared a specialist 50 miles away who did testing and helped teachers work out individual learning plans for students who needed them. She could add students' names to the testing list, but it would probably be several months before the specialist could get to them and then it was expected that the students would still be Emily's responsibility.

Emily began to panic...she was having trouble just figuring out a schedule for teaching all the subjects in two grades within the six-hour day...and the textbooks were so old. Of course the principal told her there was no money for new books. This year she would have to make do with what she had.

The principal, Ray Bright, was becoming concerned about Emily. First she had come to him about her problems finding a place to live, and then she could not figure out how to get her foreign car fixed when the nearest dealer was 200 miles away. She just did not trust Sam at the garage.

Ray suspected Emily was probably lonely. There were not many young unattached people in town, but she did not seem anxious to mix anyway. She had not appeared at church, and she did not seem comfortable with the parents waiting for their kids in the school yard. He knew she was driving the 400 mile-round trip to the city most weekends.

Ray hated hiring teachers from outside; so few of them stuck it out. It did not seem to matter how much you tried to help; the changes were just too great for them. He always tried to hire local people, but not many went to college and those who did usually moved away to take jobs with better pay. So he hired another outsider and crossed his fingers that this one would see the advantages of teaching in a rural school and living where you could still enjoy the pleasures of the outdoors and count on your neighbor down the road.

Ray liked being the principal at High River. Sure, there were always the budget problems, but every principal had those. He knew

all the kids, parents were running the school library, and some were even starting to help with after-school clubs. There were always people willing to do special programs in classrooms whenever teachers asked. Still it was hard for his school to hire and keep good teachers. He was sorry that the state colleges did not do more to prepare teachers for a place like High River, especially when so much of the state was rural.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

In 1972 there were approximately 790,000 public school teachers employed in non-metropolitan areas; about one out of every three public school teachers was employed outside metropolitan areas. (Sher, p. 27). Yet, colleges and universities continue to graduate "cookie cutter" teachers with the same training for teaching in such different settings as Hartford, Conn.; Wellesley, Mass.; and Lubec, Maine. Understanding child development, providing effective instruction, assessing students' learning, etc. are important skills for any teacher in any school. The bases of effective instruction are similar in rural, urban, and suburban schools. But there are important differences in these school settings, differences for which most beginning teachers are unprepared. This paper focuses on the differences which characterize rural schools and suggests ways in which teacher preparation programs might train beginning teachers specifically for rural schools.

Section I

Broad responsibilities and skills are expected of teachers in rural schools. Elementary teachers work across grade levels and

secondary teachers work across content areas. The elementary teacher may have grades 6, 7, and 8 in one room and the secondary teacher might teach several math and science courses. Such wide-ranging assignments can be either the source of the fragmentation and panic that Emily felt or the opportunity for the integration of both content areas and age groups of children.

In many rural schools, there are no special teachers for art, music, or physical education. Regular classroom teachers frequently are expected to include these curriculum areas as part of their instructional responsibilities. In some rural schools, these areas may be eliminated from the curriculum because teachers can not or will not include them.

Student services such as guidance or special education often fall primarily to the regular staff because of the absence of highly specialized support personnel. While most teachers may have had a brief introduction to exceptional children and may have a passing acquaintance with counseling skills, they rarely have enough training in these areas to provide other than stop-gap services. Teachers in more populated areas also often participate in such services, but they have access to advice from specialized experts. Rural settings place a tremendous range of demands on teachers. Those who come with little job experience are often at a loss, saying "Nothing prepared me for this! Where's the reading consultant, the guidance counselor, and the phys ed teacher? I can't do all this. There's not enough time or help and I don't know how anyway!"

There are several ways in which teacher preparation programs can help prospective teachers prepare for the breadth of responsibilities expected in rural schools.

A. Increase the number of content areas in which students are prepared to work.

The biology teacher must become at least a science teacher and preferably a science teacher with an additional area of expertise, such as history or math. The elementary teacher must be able to work with the total curriculum without assistance from specialists.

B. Increase the age ranges with which students are prepared to work.

Teachers in rural schools are expected to work with a broader range of ages than teachers in other school settings. Several grades in one room are common in the elementary school. In the secondary school where many courses may be offered only every other year, there are students from at least two and often three or four grades in a course. In addition to working with students of different ages, teachers must be able to provide instruction to students with varying entry skills.

C. Develop students' skills in integrating the curriculum.

Connecting content areas in the curriculum through topics, themes or problems is one way to decrease the fragmentation often experienced by teachers in rural schools. Arts, social

studies and literature might be integrated in a "humanities" program. Writing, computer usage, and math all might be taught as the use of symbol systems. Or a secondary school might choose to teach advanced math as needed as an integral part of advanced science courses rather than as a separate course needing another teacher at a different time. Teachers in both elementary and secondary schools can develop topical curricula in areas such as social studies, science, literature, home economics and industrial arts which are taught to integrated age groups in three or four-year cycles. Specific topics can also provide a school or classroom focus which integrates content areas. For example, a school might study "inventions" by reading, interviewing inventors and users, investigating the legal patent process, determining a locally-needed invention, trying out processes of inventing, etc.

In other words, programs preparing teachers for rural schools need to develop generalists. Implementing programs which run counter to the trends toward specialization and differentiation is a task which is difficult but necessary to the quality of schooling in rural areas. In most cases, teacher preparation programs would not change drastically, but rather would modify emphases. Integrative studies seminars, methods courses which look at integrated or interdisciplinary programs for schools, academic area rather than special subject majors are all ways in which programs can work toward developing teachers who are prepared to undertake the broad responsibilities of rural schools.

Section II

Teachers in rural schools are expected to enhance the close relationship between the school and the community. School board members might be in and out of the school at any time to look at the water pump the superintendent wants to repair, to check on some old texts a teacher wants to replace, or to say hello to the new teacher. Community members may be counting and inspecting the cars in the school yard, commenting on the relationship of teachers' salaries to the age, number, and make of vehicles. The bus driver, cook, custodian and teachers often have children or grandchildren in the school, increasing and/or complicating their school connections.

These community members may also have a real sense of ownership of the local school. In many rural areas the school is the primary municipal expense, the reason why local taxes may go up or down, and one of the few constantly visible consumers of tax dollars. Many individuals as well as elected or appointed representatives may have a say in school operation.

The rural school and its staff may also be expected to fill many of a community's needs for socializing, in addition to its needs for formal schooling. As the largest meeting place in the community, the school building has multiple functions and needs to be available for community use of classrooms as well as use of the usual public areas such as the library or gymnasium. A basketball team can provide the primary social activity in a long winter. School dances may be community affairs drawing people of several generations. Arranging for traveling concert groups,

setting up craft shows and organizing Saturday movies are community responsibilities unexpected by teachers not prepared to teach in rural schools. Teacher preparation programs can help participants understand and anticipate the special relationship between rural schools and their communities.

A. Increase students' understanding of the roles of the community in American schooling.

Most students come to teacher preparation programs with a narrow view of community-school relationships based on their own experience. Additionally, this experience most often has not been explored in relation to students' expectations for or decisions about their professional life. The issue of the relationship between a community and its schools can be a part of existing courses on the sociology or philosophy of education or the base for new courses in the functions of schools and the role of the community in determining those functions.

B. Increase students' experience with close relationships between a community and its schools.

Although course work can broaden awareness of the issues, experience in the setting is important for understanding and decision-making. Teacher trainees need an opportunity to assess their responses to community expectations. In order to experience the reality of these expectations, it is probably necessary to have responsibilities in a school that bring the student in close contact with the community. Student teaching is generally the only learning experience in which these responsibilities are possible. Therefore, it is particularly important that students thinking about working in

rural schools have at least one practicum experience in a rural school. These experiences may be of varying lengths and one month in a community may be long enough to understand its expectations. However, the primary factor in the usefulness of the experience is the extent of a student's responsibilities.

Section III

Many teachers in training who contemplate working in rural areas have little awareness of either the differences among rural communities or the characteristics of rural communities in general and their implications for work in rural schools. Most rural communities are isolated in some way. Some are also insulated, drawing in on themselves and rejecting ideas, values, or resources from outside. Others are experiencing an in-migration which brings community conflict, especially around issues related to schools. A new teacher who looks in vain for a restaurant to have a cup of coffee after 9 p.m. may feel culture shock which exacerbates the normal stress of any new job. Driving to the city for a movie or the bookstore can add to weekend exhaustion and leave less time for reenergizing for the week ahead.

While a young teacher new in a rural community may feel isolated and lonely, he or she may at the same time feel squeezed by the close watch of the community. Whose car is parked at whose house in the evening can be the topic of community conversation. Becoming an involved member of the community is one possibility for teachers in rural areas. Withdrawing into greater isolation or going away for all social and cultural activities are also common directions for teachers unprepared for living in rural communities.

A. Increase students' experience in rural communities.

Although class discussions about other persons' experiences, simulations, and films can be useful, most important are personal experiences in rural communities. Weekend trips to several different kinds of rural communities can be arranged. A reading class can go to a nearby rural school for a day to assist teachers administering informal reading inventories. Other kinds of rural school participation such as running field days or providing substitute assistance for teachers involved in staff development activities can be arranged. Most important are extended periods of work and/or student teaching which include living in the community served by the rural school.

B. Develop students' skills in accessing information and other resources.

Many students feel lost without big libraries and translate geographic isolation to professional isolation. There are at least two ways that teacher preparation programs can assist students in developing skills used to access information. One is to provide courses in the use of computers and the information systems available through them. Another is to expose students to various sources of professional information such as ERIC, professional associations, and professional journals and to assist them in developing their own networks of resource people.

C. Develop students' self-sufficiency.

Central to successful teaching in rural areas is self-sufficiency which may be at odds with the interdependent world. Students need to

be comfortable with themselves and be able to spend profitable time alone without depending on far-away friends or the kinds of social activities available only in more populated areas. Courses which help participants probe their values, continually assess skills, and build self-confidence are particularly important in teacher preparation programs for rural schools.

Self-sufficient teachers prepared to carry out the broad responsibilities of schooling in rural communities where they consciously choose to live are the most important resource of rural schools. With modifications in requirements, coursework, and student teaching experiences, teacher preparation programs can help provide these teachers for rural schools.

## REFERENCES


Drier, William H., "UNI's Commitment to Rural Education," The Small School Forum, II, 2 (Winter, 1980-81) 28-29.

Miller, Damon, "A Teaching-Guidance Specialist for Smaller School Systems," The Small School Forum, III, 2 (Winter, 1981-82) 16-17.

Muse, Ivan, "The Role of Higher Education in Rural Education," November, 1980 (ED 201 464).

Nash, Pat, and Bozarth, J., "The Duo-Specialist Project," 1967 (ED 036 472).

"Rural Teacher Training Program," Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1975 (ED 117 101).

Sher, Jonathon, Revitalizing Rural Education: A Legislator's Handbook. Washington, D.C.: National Conference of State Legislatures and National Rural Center, (September, 1978).